Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Mountain women of the world

Challenges, resilience and collective power

Mountain Partnership

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Mountain women of the world

Challenges, resilience and collective power

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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Cover photograph:
Marisol Poma Quispe (centre) and her family in Tuni Condoriri, Plurinational State of Bolivia (the)
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Foreword

Women play a key role in environmental protection and social and economic development in mountain areas. They are often the primary managers of mountain resources, guardians of biodiversity and keepers of traditional knowledge. Empowering rural women is crucial to eradicating hunger and poverty. Yet, due to discriminatory social norms, rural women still face more barriers than men in terms of access to strategic resources and the opportunity to raise their voices, which limits their potential as economic agents and resilience-builders.

Gender-based discrimination undermines women's decision-making powers and compounds their lack of access to information and networks. As a result, they are systematically under-represented in rural institutions and organizations. This affects their capacity to participate in and influence governance mechanisms at local, national and international level. Some women find themselves unable to influence decision-making even in their own households. They do not always have a say in critical choices to be made, nor frequently do they have control over the income generated through their work. Rural women's work burden and time poverty are often a result of rigid gender roles that distribute responsibilities unequally within the household, with domestic and care work falling mainly on women's shoulders.

Gender disparities manifest themselves transversally within our societies, particularly in more vulnerable groups, and are aggravated by intersecting personal, political and social dimensions, such as ethnic, economic and territorial factors, especially in rural territories. Environmental crises such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss intensify existing inequalities in vulnerable societies, with negative effects on the lives of women, since these are often among the most marginalized members of the population.

This publication highlights the stories and voices of mountain women, with a focus on rural areas and mountain tourism, and outlines a path forward to promote their empowerment and help them to realize their potential as agents of sustainable mountain development. It includes on-the-ground interviews with mountain women in eight countries (Argentina, Bolivia [Plurinational State of], Chile, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania) and the results of a global survey.

This study is published in celebration of the 2022 International Mountain Day theme, Women Move Mountains. It is also intended as a contribution to the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development 2022, by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, together with the Feminist Hiking Collective – a non-profit organization and transnational hub for feminist hikers, and a member of the Mountain Partnership.

The insights provided by this study were made possible thanks to the mountain women who trusted the researchers sufficiently to share their experiences and ambitions for the future. Further work is planned, with a focus on advocating globally for the needs and hopes identified by the research undertaken for this publication – to form a diverse, visible and collective voice of mountain women around the world.

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Kyrgyz women working on iyik – national technique for thread making
©FAO/Mirbek Kadraliev

1

Introduction

1. Introduction

Kyrgyz woman milking a cow
©FAO/Mirbek Kadraliev

Globally, women comprise more than 37 percent of the world's rural agricultural workforce, a ratio that rises to 48 percent for low-income countries, and their contribution is prominent in all agricultural subsectors (estimated based on the International Labour Organization models for 2020). In mountainous regions, more than 50 percent of women carry out agricultural activities (UNEP, 2017). They represent close to 50 percent of the world's 600 million small-scale livestock managers and about half of the labour force in small-scale fisheries (FAO, 2020). These figures almost certainly underestimate women's full contribution to agriculture as their often unpaid work is not always recognized, due to a range of barriers both visible and invisible.

Despite their contribution, across regions rural women still face major gender-based constraints that limit their potential as economic agents and their capacity to reap the full benefits of their work. A root cause of discrimination lies in social norms, attitudes and beliefs, which shape how women and men are expected to behave, the opportunities that are offered to them, and the aspirations they can pursue. Discriminatory sociocultural norms affect how policies and legal frameworks are formulated and implemented; who participates in decision-making processes and governance mechanisms; how rural institutions are managed; how service providers target their clients and prioritize their needs; and, ultimately, how resources are allocated and decisions are taken within households and communities (CIM, 2022).

Households in rural and mountainous regions in developing countries typically pursue multiple ways of earning their livelihoods (Nobre *et al*, 2017). In the areas and communities considered in this publication, women are mainly involved in agriculture, including farming and agribusiness, and in tourism as trekking guides or porters as well as small-business owners and entrepreneurs. Due to the interplay of multiple overlapping barriers faced by mountain and rural women, work that is community-led has been particularly important for these people.

This report highlights the challenges faced by women who identify themselves as "mountain women". It is based on the results of a community-led, participatory, exploratory social research project involving 313 participants. Its main goal was to focus on and outline the multiple, diverse challenges faced by mountain women drawn from different backgrounds, contexts and geographies, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to highlight ways mountain women have strengthened their resilience, solidarity and collective power. Importantly, the report aims to identify opportunities for future concrete social projects focused on women in mountainous areas. This is a non-extractive report that places the experiences of mountain women and their communities at the centre of its findings.

The field researchers who conducted the research have different professional roles, expertise and backgrounds (see Annex 1). Some of them work at a professional level in mountains as mountain or trekking guides, or tourism guides. Others are involved in community-based tourism, outdoor education, conservation work, work at universities, or are linked to international cooperation projects and sustainable tourism.

1.1 Mountain Women of the World network

All the researchers are members of the Mountain Women of the World network.[1] Founded in 2020 by Mujeres a la Cumbre,[2] Empowering Women of Nepal,[3] Women Who Hike – Africa,[4] the Topchu Art Group,[5] the Feminist Hiking Collective,[6] Kilimanjaro Women[7] and Las Cholitas Escaladoras,[8] the network aims to develop a transnational community of mountain women to build their collective leadership, strengthen economic justice, and harness the collective knowledge and experience of mountain women to protect mountains.

©Anna Otto

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[1] www.mountainwomenoftheworld.org
[2] https://mujeresalacumbre.com/
[3] http://empoweringwomenofnepal.wordpress.com/
[4] http://womenwhohike.africa/
[5] https://instagram.com/topchugroup/
[6] https://feministhikingcollective.org/
[7] www.instagram.com/ekeney_njau/
[8] www.facebook.com/cholitasescaladoras/

Their objective is to narrate mountaineering as a collective experience that strengthens women's collective power, care, sharing and solidarity, to build humility, resilience and reciprocity with Mother Earth.

1.2 The Mountain Partnership

Several of the organizations that founded the Mountain Women of the World network are members of the Mountain Partnership,[9] the United Nations alliance of governments and organizations dedicated to improving the lives of mountain peoples and protecting mountain environments around the world. The Mountain Partnership envisions, by 2030, a world with empowered mountain communities and increased public and private sector commitment to and investment in sustainable mountain development. The overall objective is to address the climate and biodiversity crises in mountains and ensure social and economic livelihoods and well-being for mountain people, leaving no one behind, as well as the conservation and sustainable use of mountain ecosystems and resources, for the benefit of people and the planet.

By tapping the wealth and diversity of resources, knowledge, information and expertise within its global membership, the Mountain Partnership engages in advocacy and stimulates concrete initiatives at all levels to address threats, improve quality of life, and sustain healthy environments in the world's mountain regions.

Machhapuchhare in Nepal
©Daniel Matthews

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[9] www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/en/

MUJERES
a la
CUMBRE

Researcher Patricia Breuer Moreno (R) in the Plurinational State of Bolivia with key informants
©Raphael Suwwan

2

Research on mountain women by mountain women

2. Research on mountain women by mountain women

Researchers Muna Gurung (L) and Patricia Breuer Moreno (R) in Nepal ©Patricia Breuer Moreno

Central to the methodology for the research was a determination to conduct it in a participatory, horizontal manner. From the outset, it was established that those involved should themselves be mountain women. The research process was launched by contacting the member organizations of the Mountain Women of the World network, together with other established mountain tourism stakeholders developing activities in the publication's focus countries: Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania.

A collective research methodology was developed involving members of the Mountain Women of the World network, which resulted in the development of a guidance document; key principles to adhere to for privacy, safety; semi-structured research questions; and training in dialogue facilitation and video recording.

The research was conducted among 313 women who live and/or work in the mountains in 8 focus countries (52 women in Argentina, 51 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 48 in Chile, 58 in Nepal, 17 in Italy, 39 in Kyrgyzstan, 25 in Kenya and 23 in the United Republic of Tanzania). It took place between June and August 2022 and was led by local mountain women.[10]

The participating women were selected non-randomly through the network of researchers in the eight countries, all of whom satisfied the criteria of self-identification as women who lived and/or worked in the mountains. Of the group of key informants, 98 of the 313 women interviewed were aged between 30 and 40.

In seven of the eight focus countries, the semi-structured interviews took place in person, either outside or in the homes of the mountain women, in the buildings of mountaineering organizations in the respective countries, or inside or outside community spaces. In Italy, the interviews were conducted via video calls or by written questionnaire.

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[10] Some pending interviews were conducted in November 2022.

As part of the research, data were also collected through an online survey conducted between June and August 2022. This was distributed within the researchers' networks, as well as through the Mountain Partnership (see Annex 2). The research participants in the eight countries were also asked to complete the survey questionnaire during their interviews.

Muna Gurung interviewing a mountain woman in Nepal
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

The questionnaire consisted of 34 questions that sought to elicit the perceptions of respondents on aspects such as: livelihoods and the challenges of living and working in mountainous regions; the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects; the local impacts of climate change; the benefits of tourism; migration; and strategies for collective power.

Participants who self-identified as mountain women were engaged in a range of rural activities, such as farming and handicrafts. Some had substantial experience of working in the mountain tourism industry as guides, porters, cooks or guesthouse managers. A deliberate choice was made to select women representing a range of experience levels and activities, so as to provide different perspectives, including those of women engaged in mountain-based activities at various points in their careers.

The researchers benefited from the collaboration of local referents – in many cases, male mountain guides and professionals – who connected them with professional mountain women and communities of artisans and rural women for the interviews.

As well as explaining the main purpose of the project to the participants, the researchers gave them ideas on how to keep in touch with each other after the research project had ended, in order to build on their collective strength.

Artisans Fortunata Vasco Limache (left), Teodocia Quispe Mamani (middle) and Valeriana Quispe Mamani (right), Plurinational State of Bolivia (the)
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

Woman weaving a basket in Nepal
©Sitaram Magar

3

Key insights

3. Key insights

Woman in Uluguru Mountains, United Republic of Tanzania
©Pius Matunge

The interviews enabled the researchers to learn about the challenges and experiences of mountain women through their own narrative. The conversations with the research participants provided a clearer understanding of mountain communities and some of the challenges they face.

The research also provided evidence from mountain women on factors that are known to be central to gender inequalities highlighted in previous research and development work, including the following:

- Women's work (professional, technical and domestic) is socially, politically and economically invisible in most countries. Achieving recognition for the value of this work – paid and unpaid – and specifically for its contribution to the economy, the environment, sustainable development and efforts to tackle poverty – remains a challenge for many mountain women.

- Mountain women's quality of life suffers from the negative impacts of climate change linked to reduced water availability; increased weather variability for crops and livestock; and increased risks of fires, forced migration and loss of assets caused by disasters.

- Working women in many mountain regions have limited access to maternity leave and a lack of capacity for building opportunities during motherhood.

- In many sociocultural environments and work sectors in mountains traditionally dominated by men, women are exposed to gender-based violence, such as intimidation, workplace harassment, impunity and sexual violence.

- Women in mountain regions, especially in rural areas, generally have poor access to basic health services.

> “*Mountain women are the narrators of this report, not the subject. Despite all the discrimination and violence, mountain women have strengthened their collective power in the face of challenges, and there is nothing that cannot be achieved, for the common good of all nature, when we are connected, when we are together.*”

3.1 Global survey

There was significant variation in the socioeconomic backgrounds of the respondents, with workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors (about 60 percent of respondents) and women primarily involved in agriculture representing almost 80 percent of all respondents. Almost 200 women were heads of their households, and 57 percent owned their own business. More than two-thirds said they did two or more types of job.

Perceived discrimination in their territory was common among the mountain women respondents (70 percent). Factors that they highlighted as increasing risks of discrimination and marginalization included being a migrant, being Indigenous, being poor, being responsible for unpaid care work, lack of confidence, living in rural areas, and age (both being young and being old). Discrimination was expressed not only, or not always, in terms of "prohibitions", but also in terms of sociocultural attitudes and gendered norms that assign women a subordinate position compared with men, and is also reflected in language and behaviours.

A market scene with a view of Mountain Kilimanjaro in Moshi, the United Republic of Tanzania
©FAO/Simon Maina

Respondents felt that they face specific challenges to succeed in their business and or work because they are women (70 percent), and additional barriers compared with their male counterparts who are in positions of power (77 percent), such as lack of respect and trust, despite their higher education. Gendered workplace discrimination and inequality were described, particularly in the form of lower income for women than their male counterparts, while working longer hours. Also highlighted were unequal child care burdens and the struggle to find a balance between raising a family and the need to engage in paid employment; having a menstrual cycle; having to take time off due to pregnancy; and safety at work and lack of freedom of movement, especially for certain jobs such as mountain guides and porters.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has made existing injustices more visible, and posed new challenges to mountain women in different contexts and with different backgrounds.

In terms of livelihoods, many lost their jobs or saw their work decline dramatically, often due to the closure of borders and the subsequent impact on mountain tourism. At the same time, some women reported working shifts of more than 12 hours to earn enough money, given the challenging circumstances.

Researcher Ada Rasulova on a Zoom call in Kyrgyzstan during the COVID-19 pandemic
©FAO/Mirbek Kadraliev

Another impact concerned unpaid care work, which increased and burdened women disproportionately. Some of the mountain women respondents who are mothers spoke of the substantial additional child care burden. Extra housework and care of elderly household members were also mentioned, as was the social and familial pressures that come with parenting, shouldered principally by women.

Economic impacts included fewer financial resources, rising prices and lower revenues for farmers for their produce.

A greater sense of isolation and loneliness was widely reported, exacerbating the remoteness and lack of connection generally experienced by many mountain communities. Poor access to the Internet and/or devices was also mentioned as something that deepened the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some mountain women spoke of a heightened need to preserve Indigenous and traditional knowledge, identity and heritage, which in times of crisis are often threatened.

Conversely, there was a strong sense of coming together during the pandemic, with reports of greater support shown between neighbours, friends and colleagues, including through food sharing and the building of support networks. In the words of one mountain woman: *"In times of challenges, people get closer, and life in the mountains is full of challenges."*

In terms of sources of collaboration and support, women community leaders, friends, family and the Mountain Women of the World network were all mentioned.

To a question on sources of strength – on what helps us to face difficulties – the answers included nature, spirituality, associations, cooperatives, family, friends and colleagues, and connections worldwide.

A range of initiatives were set in place by mountain women to address the difficulties posed by the pandemic. These included organizing educational activities for children, holding virtual meetings, saving local seeds, setting up food banks, walking, going on group runs and bicycle rides, selling crops, cooking, studying, meditating, teaching breathwork and trauma healing tools, and finding more connection with the community. One mountain woman observed that the pandemic *"allowed us to realize the importance of women being united".*

To a question on what would help to strengthen mountain women's communities if something similar to the pandemic were to happen again, respondents mentioned local markets; nurseries for children and care facilities for the elderly; accessible housing; social safety nets; access to financial resources; access to food; support for farming; better connectivity; schools to develop skills for women; sharing the experiences of similar communities around the world; having a more inclusive and diversified community structure; more local connections; outdoor, distanced meet-ups; a stronger women's support network; more social support; and more inclusivity, with a culture of embracing diversity and more community solidarity.

Winter in Chile
©Natalia Reyes Escobar

The impacts of climate change

The main concern highlighted by the respondents with regards to climate change was water. The primary issue emerged as water scarcity, with indications that there is considerably less water filling the natural springs and rivers, and that lack of water is causing droughts and damaging agricultural output. Some mountain women also reported an increase in prolonged periods of heavy rains, rapid flooding and strong winds. Several spoke of sudden changes in the weather and climatic conditions, with an inconsistency in seasonal temperatures, leading to a decline in both agricultural yields and tourism rates and revenues. Women spoke of their desire to be able to earn a more sustainable income by growing cash crops, and their disappointment when these were devastated by torrential rainstorms. General concern was also expressed about rising temperatures, which were observed to have caused an increase in wildfires.

Benefits from mountain tourism

The benefits of tourism – at least when there are no COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions – and the importance of remittances for the well-being of mountain communities were acknowledged by more than 90 percent of respondents.

Nevertheless, a number of mountain women expressed concern about the type of tourism being developed in many mountain locations: extractive mountain tourism,[11] which has destructive impacts on highland environments and the people who live there, benefits neither mountain women nor their communities.

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[11] Extractive mountain tourism is tourism in mountain areas that is focused on the extraction of tourism value in economic terms.

Tiji Festival in Nepal
©Susheel Kumar Shrestha

3.2 Reflections from the researchers

> *"This project is also transforming our own lives, while we work as researchers."*
> Patricia Breuer Moreno

A number of telling reflections were made by the researchers in the field while they were conducting interviews with other mountain women.

Patricia Breuer Moreno, from Argentina and Chile, commented that, at a personal and professional level, the project has helped her to grow.

"I found myself in a role that I had been looking for a long time and I loved it. I would live dedicating myself to working on projects like this. I was very enriched by each woman interviewed, by the communities visited, and the challenges faced," she said. "I feel very responsible for the women interviewed – for generating a platform of visibility for them, and a place of connection. We already know each other and now we must respond to that first human encounter.

"This project allows us to reflect on the importance of working together, of supporting and collaborating among different formal and non-formal collectives that together we are undoubtedly stronger. We are an instrument to create real changes in the mountain communities where we work, at a time when we must integrate, complement each other and work together to take care of our mountain environments and their communities. The glaciers, flora, fauna and natural resources of our mountains are being negatively impacted, and together we can make this issue visible, create awareness and work to generate a change from an international platform, since what happens here in Chile also happens and is invisible in other regions."

Researchers Muna Gurung (L) and Patricia Breuer Moreno (R) in Nepal
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

Elena Ghizzo, from Italy, said that she hopes the research will have an impact on how mountain women are portrayed. “To the media and communications of the international community, we ask you to narrate with us the multiple, collective stories of mountain women as a collective force of resilience,” she commented.

3.3 Country findings

These findings are the result of interviews conducted within each focal country and do not include the findings of the global survey. The regions and villages of each focus country where key informants were interviewed are listed in order of the number of key informants.

Argentina

In Argentina, where 52 women were interviewed, predominantly in the mountainous cities of Mendoza, Salta and Catamarca, María Emilia Roldán shared her experience of living in the mountains and connecting with the community in which she lives: “Among my various jobs, I am part of a project called Suma Nativas, where we produce native plants for reforestation and to generate an environmental promotion of xerogardening[12] to promote the care of water, which today is a worldwide problem,” explained Roldán, who is from Mendoza. Although a project with a gendered perspective, Suma Nativas allows men to participate, if they are willing to work on what Roldán calls “this gender axis”. “My challenges are to beautify my house, my garden, and to be more and more self-managing and I think I will never leave this place,” she added. “This is my place in the world, here I feel a completeness – the mountain completes me.”

Collective power, community, and building strong, interdependent relationships is a key part of the life, livelihoods and professions of those who live in the mountains, particularly due to the gendered dynamics that often come into play. More than two out of three of the mountain women interviewed said they had experienced discrimination in some form.

Key informant Concepción Sosa's farm in Salta, Argentina ©Patricia Breuer Moreno

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[12] Xerogardening includes landscaping and gardening in ways that reduce or eliminate the need for supplemental irrigation.

Plurinational State of Bolivia

Of the 51 key informants in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, predominantly based in Alto Mullini (close to Huayna Potosi, the tallest mountain in western Bolivia [Plurinational State of]), Pinaya Illumani, Chunayi, Tuni Condoriri and Sajama (where the highest mountain in Bolivia is located), 44 reported having experienced discrimination. Mountain women have long been discriminated against by the prevailing patriarchal system, based on gender, class, occupation, Indigenous ethnicity, colour, or because they come from or live in rural areas. In Bolivia, mountaineering and mountain tourism are sectors that are heavily dominated by men.

Key informant Sonia Altamirano, 29, whose mother was a *Cholita* (a member of an Indigenous culture in Bolivia [Plurinational State of]), said she has experienced discrimination, as did most such women in this mountain area. However, times are changing, says Altamirano. "Before, the *Cholitas* were forbidden from speaking and expressing their opinions. Now, the *Cholitas* are more open. They don't need anyone to tell us or force us – they make their own decisions."

Women hiking in the Plurinational State of Bolivia
©Helena Coll-Vinent Arbat

Chile

In Chile, the 48 key informants were based mainly in the south in the regions of Coyaique, Araucanía, Santiago, Putre and Parinacota, which are close to the Andes. Among them was Patricia Soto Bórquez, who gives motivational talks to other mountain girls and women. "Many mountain women experience discrimination by men, but personally I have had less support from other women," she said. "They ask questions like "I don't know why you are there" and "Why are you a mountain guide – you were sharing a tent with a bunch of men?" They immediately make comments about you being promiscuous. And I heard those comments more from women than from men. So, it goes both ways. I think mountain women have very damaged self-esteem."

Key informant
Nicole Porter Ekdahl in Chile
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

Italy

In Italy, only 29 percent of the 17 key informants questioned said they had faced discrimination. The respondents were mainly based in and around the northern towns of Trento and Belluno, which are close to the Dolomites. One of these is Marzia Bortolameotti, 39, who lives in Trento. "I'm a mountain leader and a professional journalist dealing mainly with digital content in the outdoor field, and I created a blog to create a community of mountain women in the area," she explained. Her most pressing challenges have been as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Organizing events was very difficult because I had to cancel them due to the various restrictions."

Farmer with her cow in Aosta Valley, Italy
©Roberto Cilenti

Kenya

The 25 key informants in Kenya, who are predominantly based in Chogoria and Naromoruc, which are close to Mount Kenya, described how the tourism sector is seasonal in this East African country, with almost everyone working in it also involved in some sort of agricultural activity.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Kenya, most of the mountain women returned to their villages or resorted to farming and casual agricultural work, such as tea and coffee picking, as many businesses had to close. Due to the gender dynamics prevalent in Kenyan society, women are trained in agriculture from a young age. Very few women have the opportunity to pursue passions such as becoming a mountain guide. Coercive power structures were highlighted during the interviews, together with a lack of economic empowerment programmes and education opportunities. These challenges were compounded by the pandemic and by bureaucracy, which is not conducive to supporting local businesses.

However, in response to the difficulties experienced during the pandemic, a number of women from around Mount Kenya joined forces to set up savings and credit cooperative organizations, which helped them to raise loans and investments for farming projects that could support each other and their families. The majority of the key informants in Kenya reported being able to connect with other women during the pandemic through these and other activities.

There are many Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions in Kenya that offer vocational training as an alternative to universities and other forms of higher education. Such programmes could provide an incentive for more women to start working in mountain settings.

View of Kilimanjaro from Amboseli National Park, Kenya
©Sergey Pesterev/Unsplash

Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, the 39 key informants were from regions close to the northern Tian Shan Mountains in the east of the country, including Issy-Kul, Chon Kemin Chuy and Chon Alay Osh-ym. In these areas, the disparities in access to services between rural and urban populations are substantial, including access to basic health services. Lack of modern equipment in the village hospitals forces rural women to give birth at home or to look for better services in the city, where they may face social discrimination. Language barriers discriminate against women with lower education levels, and sociocultural norms can be particularly harsh for single and divorced women.

Kyrgyz mountain woman cooking
©FAO/Mirbek Kadraliev

Nepal

In Nepal, 58 women were interviewed, predominantly from the mountainous villages of Tilche, Pokhara and Solokhumbu in central northern Nepal. Muna Gurung from Pokhara was one of the key informants. She has had experience of living and trekking in the mountains and has been part of empowerment projects that enable women to become trekking guides. She said: "I really wanted to become a trekking guide as I had never seen a woman guide before. After trying so many places to find a job, I was introduced to Lucky who is one of the founders of Empowering Women of Nepal and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking company. [The companies are run by] three sisters who help other women, just as they helped me."

For Gurung and many of the key informants the researchers worked with, accessing trekking jobs and other work in rural and mountain communities was difficult. All the key informants said that they faced additional barriers compared with their male counterparts, and many, like Gurung, faced challenges due to the intersecting obstacles of gender, class, caste, race and religion.

The significance of mountain women working and coming together, grounded in their collective power and resilience, emerged as key in overcoming gender-based challenges and finding common ground. Gurung recalls how she was helped by the training, free food and six months free hostel accommodation provided by Empowering Women of Nepal, as well by the company of the other trainee women guides she met there. "I was depressed at the time due to what I had been through, but there were so many women and girls like me that were there," she said. "I met with them and talked to them, which made me feel lighter. I learned what the importance of life is. I am more confident now and finally managed to become a guide and have been a guide for 17 years now."

Mountain cultivation in Nepal
©Anoj Subedi

United Republic of Tanzania

In the United Republic of Tanzania, 23 key respondents from the mountainous villages of Arusha, Moshi and Machame highlighted and reflected on similar challenges to those faced by other mountain women. Community-based and rural tourism in mountain areas is a tool for women to work as professionals and earn a decent salary. Women workers report a range of benefits, including improved self-esteem and welfare of their families. However, women mountain guides are exposed to sexual harassment and gender-based resentment and discrimination. "We are always taught, told and expected to stay beneath men," observed Asha Maliki, a guide on Mount Kilimanjaro. "Due to our circumstances and challenges, we must sometimes take up jobs that men do. Mountaineering is one such example. You don't need any education to become a porter or a cook on the mountain. As mountain women, we faced a lot of sexual harassment. A lot of people, before giving us work or agreeing to take us on expeditions, want to have a sexual relation with us. Even on the mountain, if we move ahead or go higher, we face a lot of resentment and discrimination."

Ekeney Njau, a tourist and mountain guide on Mount Kilimanjaro, wants to start her own company, so that she can provide job opportunities to other women with fairer working conditions. As an example, she says she would like the women porters she employs to carry lighter loads, and to be paid the same wages as men. Njau believes that by promoting a community-based mountain tourism business, women will have more options, and be able to earn income to send their children to school. Currently, many women are forced to marry or become sex workers if they do not have money. Challenges for women wanting to work in mountain tourism include acquiring the necessary equipment, and the decline in demand for trekking since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, work opportunities have diminished and many women working in the sector have had to seek alternative jobs, such as farming, in order to provide for their families.

Tanzanian woman carrying goods
© FAO/Luis Tato

Women farmers play a leading and innovative role in the High Andes, Plurinational State of Bolivia (the)
©Ana Maria Vela Lostaunau

4

Conclusion

Woman ploughing a field in Nepal
©Sitaram Magar

4. Conclusion

Despite the variables related to the regions, cultures and profiles of the women interviewed, many similarities among mountain women emerged from the research regarding their concerns and experiences, feelings, situations and realities.

The research also provided some insights into specific steps that could contribute directly to improving the conditions of mountain women, including:

- prioritizing small-scale women agricultural producers' access to local, national and international markets through orientation and training in essential skills, publicity campaigns about local production, priority access to loans and other financial services, and connections between local women producers and national and international companies that open up new markets;
- supporting programmes that advocate for the rights of rural women, understand their diversity and respond to their needs as women producers, as heads of their households, and as leaders of their communities;
- granting women the right to economic resources under equal conditions with men, as well as access to property, control of land and other assets, social protection, financial services, inheritance rights and natural resources;
- promoting community-led projects that focus on the mobilization and building of collective local power as a key to supporting the economies of local communities;
- supporting women in rural and mountain communities through empowerment projects at local level, which acknowledge the multiple and intersecting layers of discrimination that women face;

- creating more local capacity-building opportunities;
- promoting tourism as a key driver for livelihood development, conserving natural resources, and promoting cultural heritage;
- developing new rural and community-based mountain tourism experiences co-designed with local communities to generate and diversify income, harnessing the potential of mountain territories to attract trekkers, hikers and climbers;
- generating new commercial agreements with local suppliers, such as hiring local guides and staff and sourcing from local producers;
- respecting ancestral traditions, celebrations and local cultures; and
- promoting community-based tourism as a tool for the recovery of traditional knowledge, strengthening identities and promoting intercultural encounters, whereby local lifestyles and traditional knowledge are valued.

During the interviews, the women stressed the importance of their voices being heard and of mountain women being included and counted as equals in all public spaces where they have historically been excluded and under-represented. There was an overwhelming call for better community support and for creating spaces for participation (groups, networks, organizations) that are not only organized by and for mountain women, but are also open to men.

All the mountain women who participated in the project were interested in continuing to collaborate. They also expressed their ideas on how they thought the international community, including institutions, organizations, networks and governments, can better support mountain women. Responses included providing assistance in establishing infrastructure in remote communities, such as roads, lights and adequate water supplies, and the need for grants and support in the form of funding.

Learning from these insights, hopes and recommendations is essential for developing research-based policies that acknowledge the crucial role of women in ensuring the economic and social stability of mountain areas, thereby contributing to sustainable development for mountain people and their landscapes.

Alicia Dominga Laime (middle), her daughter Julieta (left) and Ima Puma Huampe (right) in Condoriri, Plurinational State of Bolivia (the)
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

5

Stories from Mountain Women of the World

ARGENTINA

Karen Martinez, Argentina
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

"My name is Karen Martinez and I'm 23 years-old. I am from Aguas Calientes, Cuesta Seis, Susque department, Jujuy. I describe myself as a mountain woman because I like climbing and walking in the mountains. We are at the foot of the Tuzgle Volcano and 200 metres from here there are hot springs, which we sometimes bathe in.

I would like the water supply for my house to be improved, because in the winter the water freezes and we must carry a larger amount of water for use in the house. An education would also be valuable to me because I didn't finish high school. It has been difficult to study as we don't have Internet; however, I don't want to leave here. I would like to have help from other young people. Here in the village, there is no one who stays in the countryside – there are only older people.

In winter it is very hard as the temperatures fall below zero and the winds are very strong. We are at 4 200 m, and if it snows, the fires in our home go out. People also get lost and stranded in the mountains at this time; a gentleman was lost on the Tuzgle Volcano and I was the only one who knew where he might be.

The community of this sector is the Aboriginal Community of Termas de Tuzgle. They are community lands, but we are 'parcelarios' [sharecroppers]. They are managed by a community member that is elected every two years. They manage everything that forms the community. I joined about four years ago as a member of the community. We participate in the assembly and at the end of every month there are assemblies, and they discuss what is happening in the community.

They built a thermal water complex on our plot of land without consulting us. They never told us if it was going to harm us in any way; they say that it is communal and that they can do what they want. We haven't experienced any problems with the mining companies because they are not in this area. However, in Puesto 6 (the town close to my place), many of the young people go to work for the mining companies. The mining company has invested resources in the town, therefore, we have to send notes to the community to ask for things, to the community leader. Sometimes we have to go to the assembly and the people say no. It depends a lot on what the assembly says; the community leader is the one who intervenes – we don't have contact with the people from the mining company.

My dream would be to climb more mountains and to learn more about the animals that I tend, for example when they are sick, I would like to know how best to accommodate them. I would change my life by doing more activities with people of my age and of course produce more animals."

PLURINATIONAL STATE OF BOLIVIA

Bienvenidos
bienvenu
welcome
refugio
casa blanca
alt. 4.800 msnm.

Sonia Altamirano, Plurinational State of Bolivia (the)
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

"My name is Sonia Altamirano, I am 29 years-old and I live here in the base camp of Mount Huayna Potosi. I manage our family business, as well as being a trekking guide. Last year I trained with the Association of Mountain Guides in trekking. I also work with the San Calixto Observatory as supervisor of the Seismology Operator.

My parents migrated from the city because of the seismological station. My dad took care of the station. My dad studied geology. He knew a lot about everything, clouds, rocks, everything. When he came here there was nothing, not even a house or water, so he built water drainage canals so that everyone could have water. He taught me a lot; he taught me about clouds. The clouds teach you; they show you what the weather is going to be like. This experience ended up being fundamental for my mountain guide training.

We live at a height of 4 800 m. I was born here. I have been here with my child, and we are both happy living here. It was very hard for us during the pandemic. Fortunately, the company I work with in seismology supported me with food, diapers and other supplies. Tourism was already dead, and this impacted the amount of money we were making trekking and at the Observatory too.

During this time, however, me and my son Leo went into the mountains a lot. I went to the high country because I had my other cabin. There were no people, there was nobody. What a pleasure it was, the mountain and nothing else! It was incredible, I mean, an incredible peace. But the bad thing about the pandemic is that the other cabins were left empty. The owners themselves left. And what happened? The thieves. Thieves came and everything was stolen from every shelter. In the front hut they stole everything.

The climate has also changed here a lot. It is tremendous. The glaciers have retreated a lot and, in the winter, there is tremendous radiation in the high country. I know it feels like it's on the beaches. The tourists say "How incredible the heat is" and the water that you could see coming down the slopes of the glacier was like giant waterfalls. In 2016 there was such a strong drought, so strong, that there was no water here, there was no river, there was nothing and the glacier was so dry and totally dark. As they begin to 'chaquear' (deforest a field to cultivate it) in the valleys or in the Amazon itself, the smoke comes out. It stays in the glaciers like a black bag, it covers it and gives more heat, that is, more radiation from the sun.

I have experienced discrimination for being a woman. My mum was a Cholita, and in this mountain area all women face this. However, times have changed for women in skirts too (referring to Las Cholitas). I could tell you about that. The 'pollera' women [women wearing traditional cholita skirts] in my mum's times could not even laugh, or give their opinion, or say anything, they were totally closed. In other words, the husband had to give his opinion before the wife. Now I see that women in skirts are more open, they don't need anyone to tell them or force them, that is, they make their own decisions. That is what I have seen."

CHILE

Patricia Soto Bórquez, Chile
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

"My name is Patricia Soto Bórquez. I am Chilean and I live near the mountains.

I live in Patagonia at the moment, I got an offer to work at the Universidad San Sebastián as director of the 'Expedition and ecotourism management engineering' course and to be in charge of the speciality of mountain environments. I thought a lot at first because I said this is a tremendous challenge – at least a woman in Chile had never been offered such a job.

Many mountain women experience discrimination by men, but personally I have had less support from other women. They ask questions like "I don't know why you are there" and "Why are you a mountain guide, you were sharing a tent with a bunch of men?" They immediately make comments about you being promiscuous. And I heard those comments more from women than from men. So, it goes both ways.

I think mountain women have very damaged self-esteem. I've been giving motivational talks for a long time now; I go a lot to schools and also to women in these communities. I think we have grown up in a culture where our emotions are frowned upon. If you scream a lot, you are hysterical, if you cry a lot, you are a cry-baby, if you get angry you are a bad woman, the witch. We have been repressed and made to feel bad and it has already hit our self-esteem. In the mountains when women enter into competition with other women, to show the other woman that she is more capable, we are terrible. Terrible!

My dream is to carry on climbing and going to more mountains. I love music, but I also love the silence in the mountains, feeling the wind on my face. I live a lot with my hair up, precisely because I love to stand against the wind and feel that sensation on my face – the sunrises, the sunsets. In fact, now I'm at the point that if a mountain comes and I like it, I climb it or if I don't like it, I keep going."

ITALY

Marzia Bortolameotii, Italy
©Marzia Bortolameotii

"I'm Marzia, I am 39 years-old and I live in Trento. I'm a mountain leader and a professional journalist dealing mainly with digital content in the outdoor field. I created a blog[13] to create a community of mountain women in the area.

Then I started working just for the promotion of my region, my autonomous province. I worked for several years at Visit Trentino, then at Trentino Marketing, where I was only doing territory promotion. It goes from Lake Garda, where we do water sports. There is a lot of water presence in Trentino as well – there are many lakes where we promote water sports like surfing and sailing.

My work, it's been very difficult. Let's say the consultancy part of requesting digital content grew, because people wanted more and more, especially during the pandemic. Organizing events was very difficult, because I had to cancel them due to the various restrictions.

This was very difficult to manage during the pandemic. However, you can improve, you can change, you can become aware. I think I became aware of that and made my life what I wanted it to be. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that we have little time.

Here we also have a very different sense of community than other people. We are more individualistic in the North than people and communities you find in the South. That certainly didn't help us during a pandemic because everyone kept to themselves.

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[13] www.donnedimontagna.com

In my opinion, discrimination in the work sphere is still there, it is useless to deny it. Although in marketing women are beginning to be taken more seriously, I realize that for certain positions, to have managerial roles, it is very rare for women. It is difficult fighting against stereotypes, fighting against this culture.

A huge challenge is also time, because with a child you must find the time to train, to prepare, time to go away, to know how to be away. For me it is a challenge to even be a few days without my daughter. Do you know how many messages come to me saying, "You're never with your daughter"? There is huge pressure to fulfil this role as a mother and the stereotypes that women have.

The big challenge is in ourselves then. We must be strong, not caring about the judgement of others. Our future generations will be as we have been, they will be even more aware, emancipated. They will choose whether to love a woman, whether to love a man, whether to have a child, whether not to have a child, whether to go to the mountains, whether not to go. They will be much freer, the next generation. So, we are still in this generation, where we fight. And so, we fight. We fight."

KENYA

Kellen Koroite (L) and Winnie Kathambi (R), Kenya
©Alia Datoo

"My name is Kellen Koroite. I live in Chogoria and I am 35 years-old. I have a shop here in Chogoriaora Town where I sell general supplies to the porters and the tourists. I sell things like bread, sodas and water as they go up and come down the mountains."

"My name is Winnie Kathambi and I am 30 years-old and I also live in Chogoria. I am a porter and I carry bags for guides. I lost my job after the pandemic because no tourists were coming. With no work, and with children and families to support, life was very hard.

After the pandemic started, there were many challenges because there were no people going up and down the mountains. Many businesses were closing, some were without even a single customer. We had to look for casual work like picking tea, picking coffee, which was also very hard because we were not used to it.

More recently, from what we have learned and from what is going on here around this area, practising agribusiness – agriculture for business – is boosting livelihoods. That's why we have joined. We are planting macadamia and avocados for exports.

Our main challenge now is our government. The political environment in Kenya is not very welcoming. It's not very conducive. We find that most of the politicians are very selfish. They don't encourage people. We don't have even economic empowerment programmes to support the citizens. However, we believe that it is through education that we can help each other.

The only thing that can help us women is if we are economically empowered. If we are given help with processing our avocados and macadamia, we can earn higher incomes."

KYRGYZSTAN

Zhibek Abdylagovna Turatbekova, Kyrgyzstan

"My name is Zhibek Abdyldaevna Turatbekovna. I live in the Chon-Alai region, in the village where the market is built. This year I turned 40.

We have a guesthouse where we work that was given to us by my husband's father. We were born here and live as if breathing our native air is our duty. Living conditions in the mountains are difficult. The advantage of living in the mountains is that we are far from technology, our children are far from the phone and the Internet. The weather in the mountains is harsh and this is a huge challenge living here. The weather can change like the four seasons in one day.

In the mountain region, women grow to be so patient. We have responsibility for caring for the cattle until our husbands come home from work. We do not know fatigue. In some families, if a husband or child falls ill with COVID-19, the woman runs to take care of them, but she does not know that she is also sick and is not being treated accordingly. The women got sick just like the men, but the women couldn't sleep like the men, because they got up earlier to take care of the kids and earn money for a living. All mothers living in the mountains have this way of life.

During the pandemic, a thought came to me. We need specialists who understand our women and can speak with them and accommodate their needs. There are a lot of girls here who got married early and did not receive an education. The wife does housework and stays at home. There are also husbands who drink and beat their wives, and this became a particular problem during the pandemic, when everyone was at home.

Maternity hospitals here do not have modern equipment, so many give birth at home which has become a very serious problem. These women are sent to the city to give birth, however, they are not accepted in the city, because they are from the village. There are also language barriers between us and the women who live in the city, so having an education is important for us, so we can integrate and receive support and facilities from city people. Moreover, single women in our culture have a very hard time mentally and financially. After divorce, a woman will be left alone with her child. She also remains without a home, so I try to help such women.

My biggest dream is to support the hardships that women in our village go through and create suitable conditions for women to work, and then teach them to relax. We have a place to rest; in the summer we go swimming, we gather women and take the children with us. We have learned a lot from the pandemic. We realized that if someone gets sick, we will all get sick. If everyone takes care of safety, we will all be safe. Material value has decreased, and we began to value health and help each other more often. Every day, we tried to do something good."

NEPAL

Muna Gurung, Nepal
©Patricia Breuer Moreno

"My name is Muna Gurung and I'm from Manang, which is in the north of Nepal. It is a rural region surrounded by the Annapurna mountains. However, I now live in Pokhara because that's where I do my work.

I am a trekking guide, rock climbing instructor and a mountain climbing guide. It was very hard for me to achieve this as I was born in Tilche and our culture is very strict. Due to my father passing away, my mother could not afford my education at school; she sent me to work for one of the wealthier families living in the region to earn more money for the family. When I was 13, my family decided I needed to be married because when women reach adolescence it is thought that it is better for women to support a family and look after a husband. I was married at 14 and had a daughter by the time I was 15.

I really wanted to become a trekking guide, as I had never seen a woman guide before. After trying so many places to find a job I was introduced to Lucky, who is one of the founders of Empowering Women of Nepal and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking company. They are three sisters who help other women, just as she helped me. My mother did not want me to go and work there. She said that so many people will come to women and offer them good jobs, they take you and then they sell you in India, but I knew that I trusted Lucky.

When I went to Pokhara I went to the woman's training, which is a basic female trekking guide training course provided by Empowering Women of Nepal, and they gave us free food, free training, and six months free stay in a hostel. I was depressed at the time due to what I had been through, but there were so many women and girls like me there. I met with them, and I talked to them, which made me feel lighter. Lucky and Dicky always encouraged me. I learned what the importance of life is. I am more confident now and finally managed to become a guide, and have been a guide for 17 years now.

For me the pandemic was really horrible, and I nearly died. Our work is based on tourists and seasonal work and due to lack of this we did not have any money. We had a lot of support from 3 Sisters. My husband also helped me a lot during this period, although I felt very weak. He reminded me of my past and how I was able to become more powerful despite what had happened, and this made me feel stronger.

I want to give a message for other mountain women: If you have a passion, never give up if you want to do something. We are all mountain women, who work in the mountains. Nepal has so many earthquakes, avalanches, landslides, flooding; so many families and properties are lost and we all need to raise awareness and bring a project for local people and give power to each other."

UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

Asha Maliki, United Republic of Tanzania
© Alia Datoo

"My name is Asha Maliki, I am 22 years-old and I live in South Moshi Soweto. I am a mountain guide. I've been doing this for three years and I live on my own. My favourite route on Kilimanjaro mountain is Umbwe and I have climbed this route five times.

There is too much to talk about in terms of what has been difficult for me in the past two years. The most difficult thing that I have had to deal with are the many changes that I've experienced in my life, my family and my community.

We had difficulty finding food, as well as problems accessing health facilities. During this time, I was supporting myself financially and I was supporting my education through my work as a mountain guide. However, due to the pandemic there were no tourists, I didn't have any work, and so I could no longer support my education. I still had to pay rent, bills, buy food and support my family. I was only able to provide one meal a day for myself and my family during that time.

The men on the mountain are the biggest difficulty. Women are never allowed to rise above men or be their counterparts. We are always taught, told and expected to stay beneath men. Due to our circumstances and challenges, we must sometimes take up jobs that men do. Mountaineering is one such example. You don’t need any education to become a porter or a cook on the mountain. As mountain women, we faced a lot of sexual harassment. A lot of people, before giving us work or agreeing to take us on expeditions, want to have a sexual relation with us. Even on the mountain, if we move ahead or go higher, we face a lot of resentment and discrimination. So it doesn’t really matter how much one has studied or one has excelled in education in terms of mountaineering. You still face discrimination and are expected to sexually appease men.

So I wanted to study to become a safari guide. This is considered more prestigious than mountain guides in my community, and has more benefits. However, because this requires more money, I was pursuing further education on how to become a good mountain guide. Unfortunately, because of lack of funds and lack of money, I had to stop my education.

During the pandemic we created an association of women. We all worked in different capacities on a mountain – some were cooks, some were waiters. We would go to weddings, and we would cook the food and serve the food and drinks as a group. So as a group we would manage to support each other.

We need help in getting more visitors and more tourists to visit the mountain. This way we will have more opportunities to work as mountain guides and get more money and tips to chase our dreams. It would also be good to start a society or a cooperative, where women can save their money and support each other financially. Also, organizing a seminar for women who are doing mountain work, where we can work with each other and discuss our challenges and empower each other.”

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Converse

Annex 1
The researchers

Patricia Breuer Moreno

Patricia Breuer Moreno was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She lived in Mendoza for more than five years and moved to Santiago, Chile seven years ago. With vast experience in social impact project management, Patricia Breuer Moreno has served as project manager and advisor for several projects related to education, communication, social entrepreneurship, sustainable development, public responsibility and sustainable tourism. She has extensive experience in facilitating capacity-building workshops for social organizations and micro-, small- and medium-sized companies.

She has worked for organizations such as Ashoka Cono Sur, Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario, La Usina, Ashoka Changemakers for the Latin American region, Caritas Argentina, the Ministry of Social Development of Argentina, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIPE)/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Asociación RESPONDE for rural villages, Inter-American Development Bank, Context Partners, World Environment Center and the US State Department.

Breuer Moreno is co-founder of Mujeres a la Cumbre from where she promotes the creation of the international collaborative network Mountain Women of the World. She is a professional trekking guide. Mountaineering and trail running are her passions. She has climbed numerous mountains in Africa, Europe, Nepal and South America, among them Aconcagua (Argentina), Ojos del Salado (Chile), Sajama and Huayna Potosí (Bolivia [Plurinational State of]), San José Volcano (Chile), Tent Peak (Nepal) and Kilimanjaro (United Republic of Tanzania).

Breuer Moreno has a degree in Education Sciences and a postgraduate degree in Educational Management from the University of San Andrés, a diploma in Strategic Management of Innovation from the University Adolfo Ibañez, an international diploma in Strategic Communication from the University Diego Portales and Pompe Fabre of Barcelona, Spain, and a diploma in Social Management from the Latin American Social Sciences Institute in Chile. She is a candidate for a master's degree in Sustainable Tourism Management from the Universidad de Cooperación Internacional de Costa Rica.

Stephanie Carmody

Stephanie Carmody is a Professor of Physical Education, Sports and Recreation at the Metropolitan University of Educational Sciences in Chile. She has a master's degree in Environment (University of Melbourne, Australia), with expertise in environmental education and vast experience in tourism industry activities related to sustainable tourism, community and Indigenous tourism.

She has been working as project manager at the Travolution Foundation since 2011.

Carmody also works as a product manager and is in charge of commercial alliances at Travolution Travel. In addition, she is linked to the Center for Local Development Studies of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Villarrica Campus, and to the Mujeres a la Cumbre in Chile organization. She is Professor of Ecotourism Careers at Duoc UC Villarrica Campus and has been working as a trekking, mid-mountain and cyclotourism guide since 2006 in various regions of Chile.

Alia Datoo

Alia Datoo, from Nairobi, is the co-founder of Women who Hike Africa Ltd. and has been an avid hiker for much of her life. It was her passion for reconnecting people with nature that led her to set up this hiking company, with the aim of encouraging people to spend time outdoors.

Born and brought up in Kenya, Datoo has had the opportunity to lead several expeditions up Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro, and to take people to witness the beauty of nature.

She was awarded a certificate in Leadership & Management for Impact by the global non-profit organization Amani Institute and has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Management. A feminist, Datoo supports Young Women Social Entrepreneurs, and is a training facilitator on the board of this global values-based learning community.

Belen Escudero

Belén Escudero, from Mendoza, Argentina, is a mountaineering instructor and member of the Centro Andino el Salto. She has been a mountaineer since she was a child. She climbed Mount Aconcagua at the age of 17, among other mountains in the Cordón del Plata, and then Mount Kilimanjaro. Later, life took her to other pathways and countries, with different professional and personal roles. For the past 15 years, she has lived in a number of countries, including Chile, Canada, Spain and the United Kingdom. Escudero is the mother of four children.

Muna Gurung

Born in Manang, Annapurna Area, Muna Gurung studied to become a trekking guide in Pokhara, Nepal with Empowering Women of Nepal. At the time, she was widely criticized by other townspeople for choosing such a non-traditional occupation. Today she is recognized as Manang's pride after setting the World Record to be the first female to climb Mount Annapurna IV. Gurung has more than 14 years' experience in trekking and rock climbing, including as a trainer.

Gurung's early life was far from easy. Married at the age of 14, she had a baby at 16. After separating from her husband, she had responsibility for taking care of her baby, mother and siblings. She started working as a daily wage labourer to make some income for the household.

In Manang, where she grew up, she saw foreigners arriving for treks and expeditions, and this sparked her interest in the sector. One day, she asked a trekking guide (male) if she could do the same work, but he replied: "It's not for females". Then she heard about the 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Company, which provided trekking guide training to women in Pokhara. Gurung was accepted for training and went on to make a career in trekking. At the time, her mother was reluctant to let her go, fearing that she could be sold and would never return. The initial days of the training were very difficult, as they were in English, which she spoke poorly. However, through hard work and long hours of practice, Gurung's command of English has greatly improved.

After starting her career as a porter, Gurung went onto work in mountain and rock climbing, as well as trekking. She has visited several countries, including Austria, Italy, Kenya, the Netherlands and Poland, representing Nepal in rock climbing and sharing her experiences as a female role model in the field.

The social research project behind Mountain Women of the World was an opportunity for Gurung to see herself from a different perspective, as well as a way to dignify her trajectory and hard work.

She describes herself as happy and satisfied with her profession, having achieved recognition and a decent income. In her own words: "All you need is passion, hard work and the ability to take risks".

Ekeney Njau

A tourist and mountain guide, born in Moshi, the United Republic of Tanzania, Ekeney Njau started working on Mount Kilimanjaro as a porter, before obtaining her licence a mountain guide, her current job.

To date, Njau has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro more than 54 times and has made more than 100 ascents. It is her dream to have a team of women and work not only on Kilimanjaro, in order to help other women.

Njau wants to promote a community to encourage women to do what they really want in life, since she has seen that many women are forced to marry or become sex workers if they do not have money. Acquiring the equipment necessary for the mountain is a challenge for many women, but with income earned in this way, they can send their children to school.

With a love of nature and the mountains, Njau's advice for women is to be independent, and not to depend on a man. Women should work and do something good in life, she believes, and above all, do what they love.

Ada Rasulova

Ada Rasulova began working in the field of tourism in her native village of Barskoon, where her uncle had founded one of the first travel companies in Kyrgyzstan. Most of the treks were done by horse, with a duration of 3 to 20 days. Ever since those early days, Rasulova's life has been linked to mountains and tourism. After graduating from university in public administration, she worked in environmental protection, mainly sustainable development. Soon, she began connecting with women in the villages engaged in handicrafts, and has been promoting handicraft products for the international market since 2009.

There are currently three projects in this area: Topchu Art Women, artisans promoting local products who work closely with the Mountain Partnership and Mountain Product Initiative; Felt School – training, seminars on no-waste production (for girls in the areas of design and marketing); and Ethno shop, to sell their products.

Rasulova has also worked as Programme Coordinator for the United Nations Development Programme project “Youth Integration Service”. Her work has involved planning and implementing the programme together with young people through participatory techniques for public mobilization; and piloting/ designing platforms and tools for effective communication/engagement and mobilization of youth.

Rasulova has a degree from the Business Administration Program at the Kyrgyz-Japan Center – an international relations diplomatic academy – and a BA in Political Science at Bishkek Humanities University, Kyrgyzstan.

Alessandra Segantin

A tour leader, with an International Mountain Leader qualification from the Union of International Mountain Leader Associations, Alessandra Segantin, from Italy, is also a Wilderness First Responder.

She has a diploma as a technical expert for tourism and a degree in Western languages and literature. While writing her final degree thesis, she spent a period doing field research in Misiones, Argentina, where she studied the effectiveness of a microcredit project dedicated to women run by Italo-Argentinian non-governmental organization Jardin de los Niños.

Passionate about mountains, she has spent several summers working in mountain huts. Since 2014, Segantin has been gaining experience as a trekking guide and has worked in Argentina, Iceland and Norway.

Currently, Segantin mainly conducts multi-day treks in the Alps. She organizes several female-only mountain activities. Her ambition is to provide both theoretical and practical preparation for any women wishing to experience the mountains for the first time with confidence and awareness, and to motivate them to raise the bar a little at a time and help them to have the ambition to face the adventure of their dreams.

Popi Spagnuoli

Popi Spagnuoli is a professional trekking and mountain guide at Escuela de guías de Alta montaña y Trekking (EPGAMT) in Mendoza, Argentina; an Andinismo Instructor; a Wilderness First Responder; and has been an instructor at the Mountain School of Club Andinista Mendoza for ten years. She has been Professor of Professional Practice at EPGAMT since 2015 and is a certified coach.

Spagnuoli is a native of Bahía Blanca, Buenos Aires, Argentina and is the mother of a four-year-old son. She works as a professional mountain guide on the emblematic mountain of her "backyard": Mount Aconcagua.

A founding member of Mujeres a la Cumbre, in the past 20 years she has done canyoning, climbing, trekking and ascents in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, France, Morocco, Peru and Spain. Among her most important achievements are: Aconcagua (6 961 m) 24 summits – she was the first woman to climb Aconcagua in winter; Llullaillaco Volcano (6 720 m) Salta, Argentina; Sajama Volcano (6 450 m) – Roof of the Plurinational State of Bolivia; and Mount Kilimanjaro (United Republic of Tanzania).

Annex 2

Questionnaire for the global survey

- Age
- Where are you based?
- Do you identify as a mountain woman?
- Do you identify as a migrant?
- Do you identify as Indigenous?
- Can you tell us a bit about you and your community, and the territory where you live?
- What is your occupation, what do you do in your life? Where, and since when, and with whom?
- Do you identify specific challenges to succeed in your work because you are a woman?
- Do you face additional barriers compared to your male counterparts? If yes, which ones?
- Do you belong to a group, network, company or an organization? If yes, please add to the comment field which one?
- Are mountain women organized and connected in your community? If not, do you think they should be organized?
- Is the organization open to all genders?
- Do mountain women face discrimination in your territory due to the following factors: gender, for living in mountain areas, for being Indigenous, for the colour of their skin, religion, disability, age (being young, old, of reproductive age etc.) or for any other reason?
- How has the pandemic affected you in terms of your life, workload, security and livelihood?
- If something similar to the pandemic was to happen again, what would help and strengthen your community?
- What new initiatives/activities have you been implementing to face the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Did you connect with other women in your community during the pandemic?
- Have you supported other mountain women during the pandemic?
- How have you seen your community become closer during the pandemic?
- What has been the hardest thing for you in the last two years?
- Who have you relied on? Who have you collaborated with?
- What are your sources of strength? What helps you to face problems and difficulties?
- What wishes, projects or ideas do you have for the future? And with whom you would like to carry these out?
- What do you think will be your biggest challenges?
- How do you think women who live and/or work in the mountains can be stronger?
- What would you need to improve your livelihood and everyday life in the mountains? From your family (parents, spouse, sons and daughters), from the community, from the government?
- What would you need to improve your livelihood and everyday life in the mountains? From your family (parents, spouse, sons and daughters), from the community, from the government?
- How do you think the international community – institutions, organizations, networks, governments – can better support mountain women?
- Are you witnessing the impacts of climate change in your area?
- If the previous answer was yes, can you explain the main impacts of climate change within your community?
- Are these changes impacting your life or your income generation activities, such as tourism, agricultural activities?
- Is your area touristic? Do you benefit from tourism (when there are no COVID-19 restrictions)? How do you benefit?
- What's next for you and your community?
- Would you move to the lowland if you could? Would you prefer your children to stay in the mountains or move out? Could you elaborate on your reasons for staying or moving out?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Annex 3
Selection of interview questions and responses

A total of 313 women were interviewed in 8 countries – 52 in Argentina, 51 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 48 in Chile, 17 in Italy, 25 in Kenya, 39 in Kyrgyzstan, 58 in Nepal and 23 in the United Republic of Tanzania. The following graphs provide a breakdown of the mountain women's responses to a selection of the interview questions.

Figure 1. Percentage of key informants who own a business

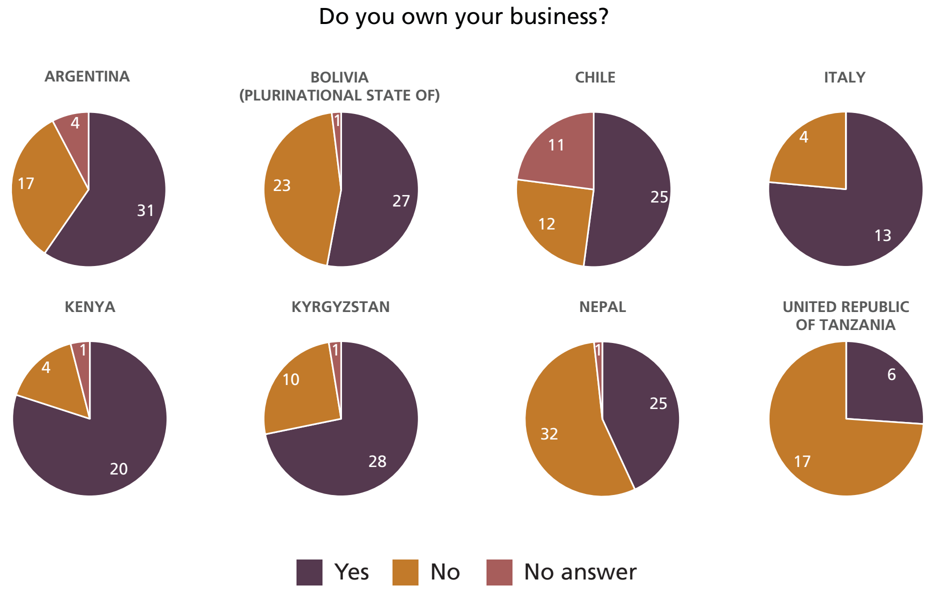


Figure 2. Number of key informants who identify specific challenges to succeeding in business as a woman

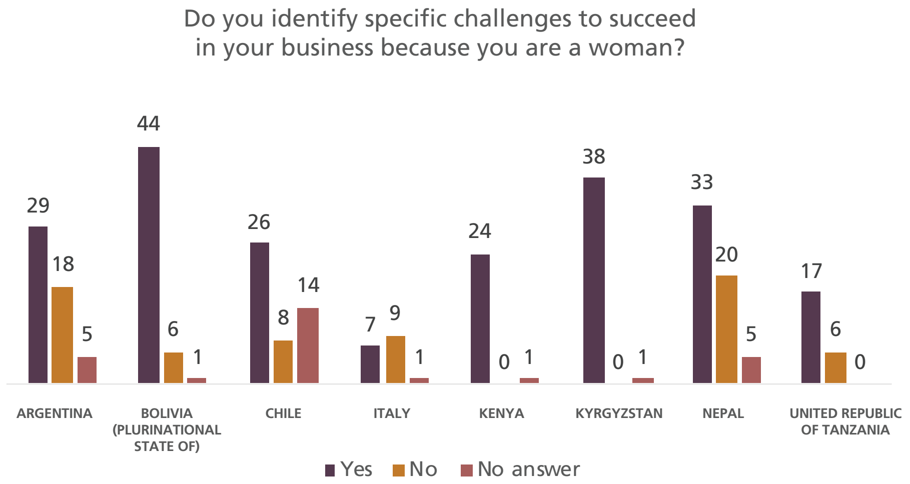


Figure 3. Number of key informants living or working in a touristic mountain area

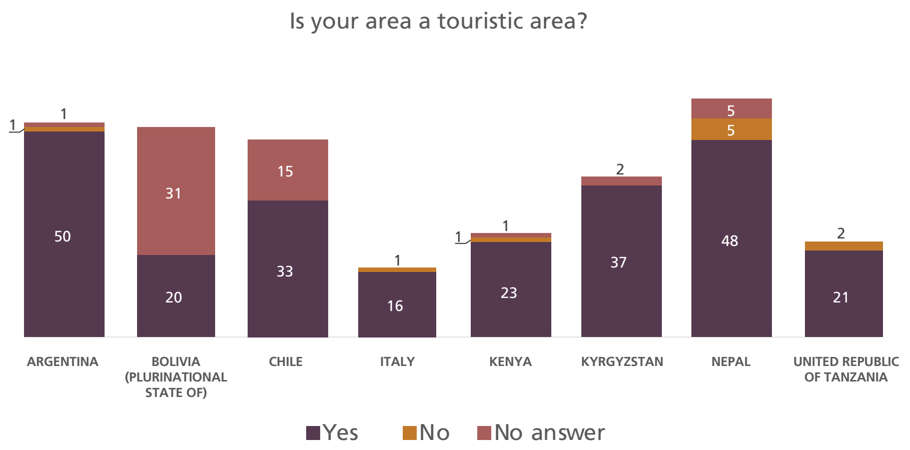


Figure 4. Percentage of key informants who express witnessing the impacts of climate change and its associated risks in the mountains where they work and/or live

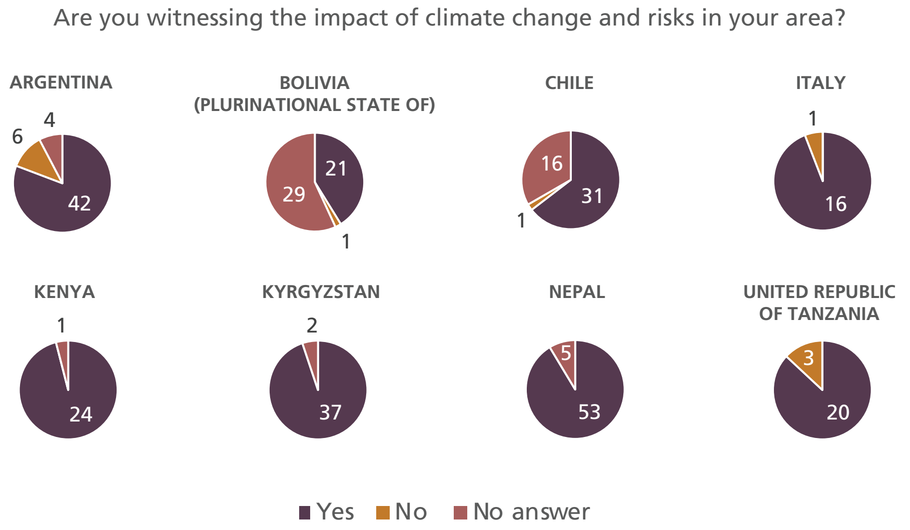


Figure 5. Number of key informants who decide how to allocate their own income

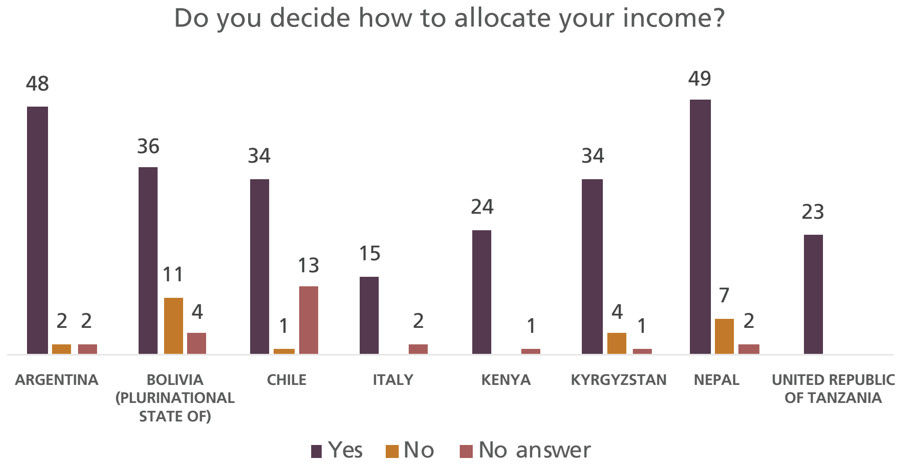


Figure 6. Number of key informants who stated women in their community participate in decision-making at the household or community level

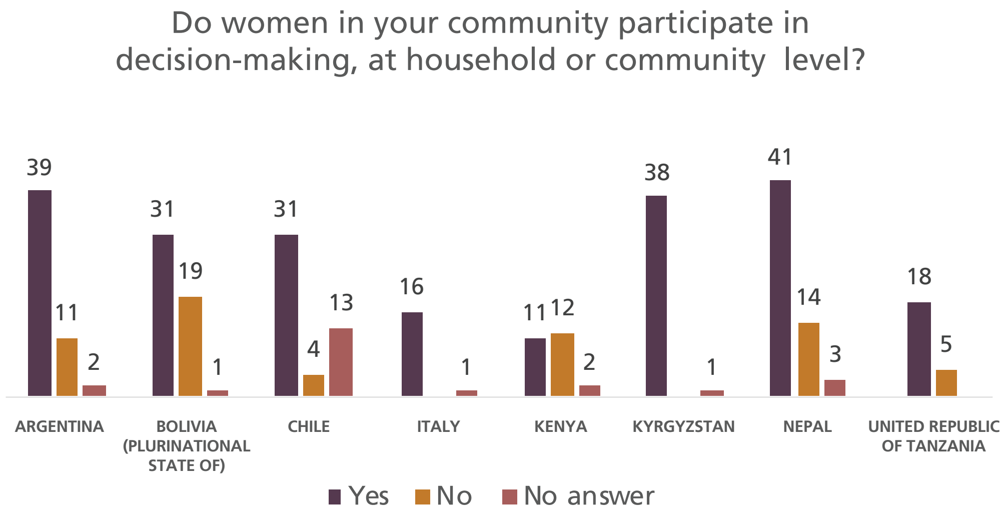


Figure 7. Number of key informants who are the head of their household

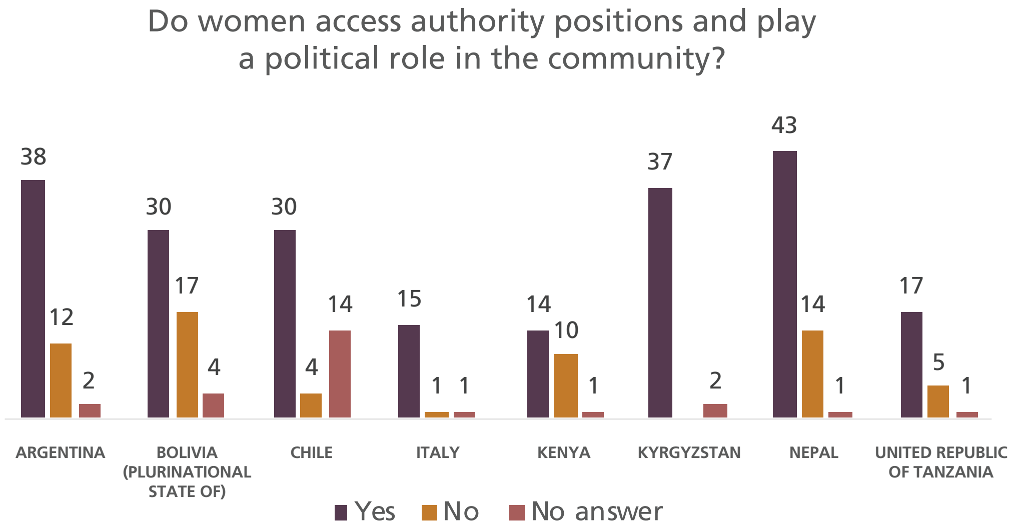


Figure 8. Number of key informants who stated women can access authority positions and play political roles in the community

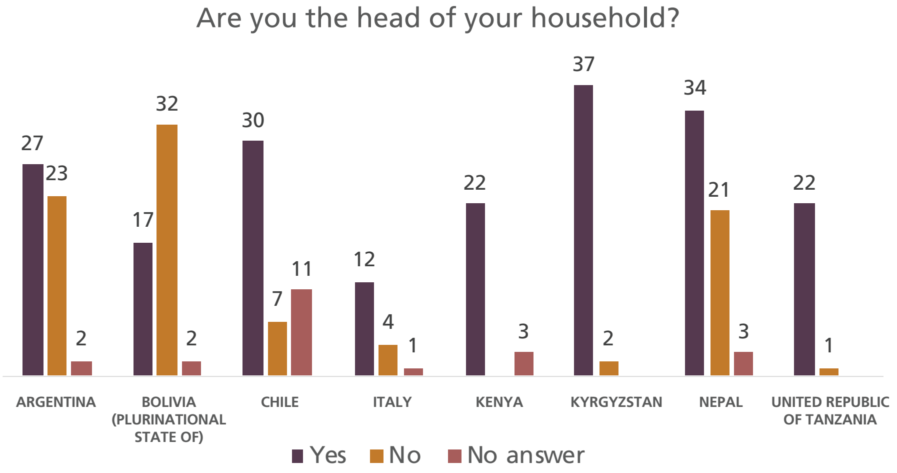


Figure 9. Number of key informants who faced discrimination in their territory

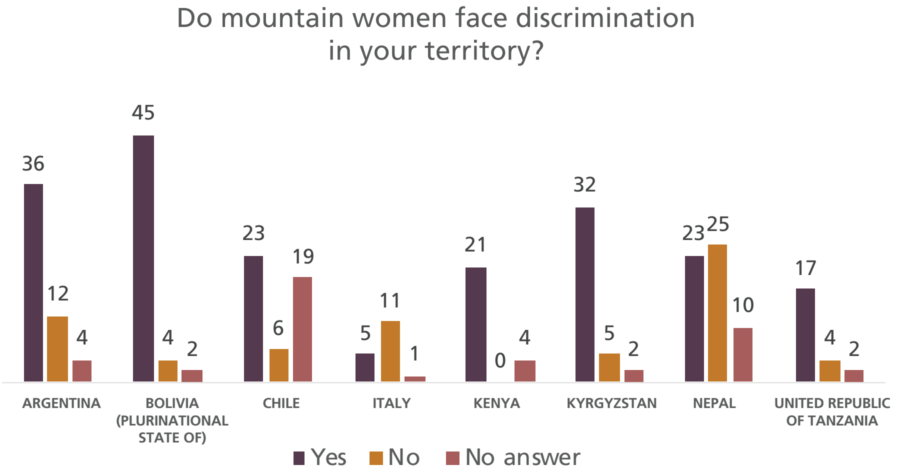
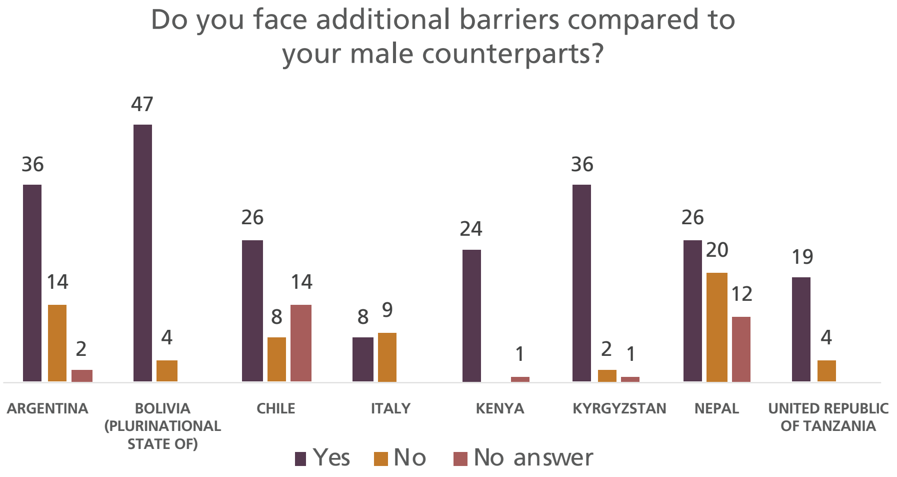


Figure 10. Number of key informants who stated they faced additional barriers compared to their male counterparts



Women play a key role in environmental protection and social and economic development in mountain areas. They are often the primary managers of mountain resources, guardians of biodiversity and keepers of traditional knowledge. Empowering rural women is crucial to eradicating hunger and poverty. Yet, due to discriminatory social norms, rural women still face more barriers than men in terms of access to strategic resources and the opportunity to raise their voices, which limits their potential as economic agents and resilience-builders.

This publication highlights the stories and voices of mountain women, with a focus on rural areas and mountain tourism, and outlines a path forward to promote their empowerment and help them to realize their potential as agents of sustainable mountain development. It includes on-the-ground interviews with mountain women in eight countries (Argentina, Bolivia [Plurinational State of], Chile, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania) and the results of a global survey.

This study is published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, together with the Feminist Hiking Collective – a non-profit organization and transnational hub for feminist hikers, and a member of the Mountain Partnership. It marks the 2022 International Mountain Day theme, Women Move Mountains, and is also a contribution to the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development 2022.

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